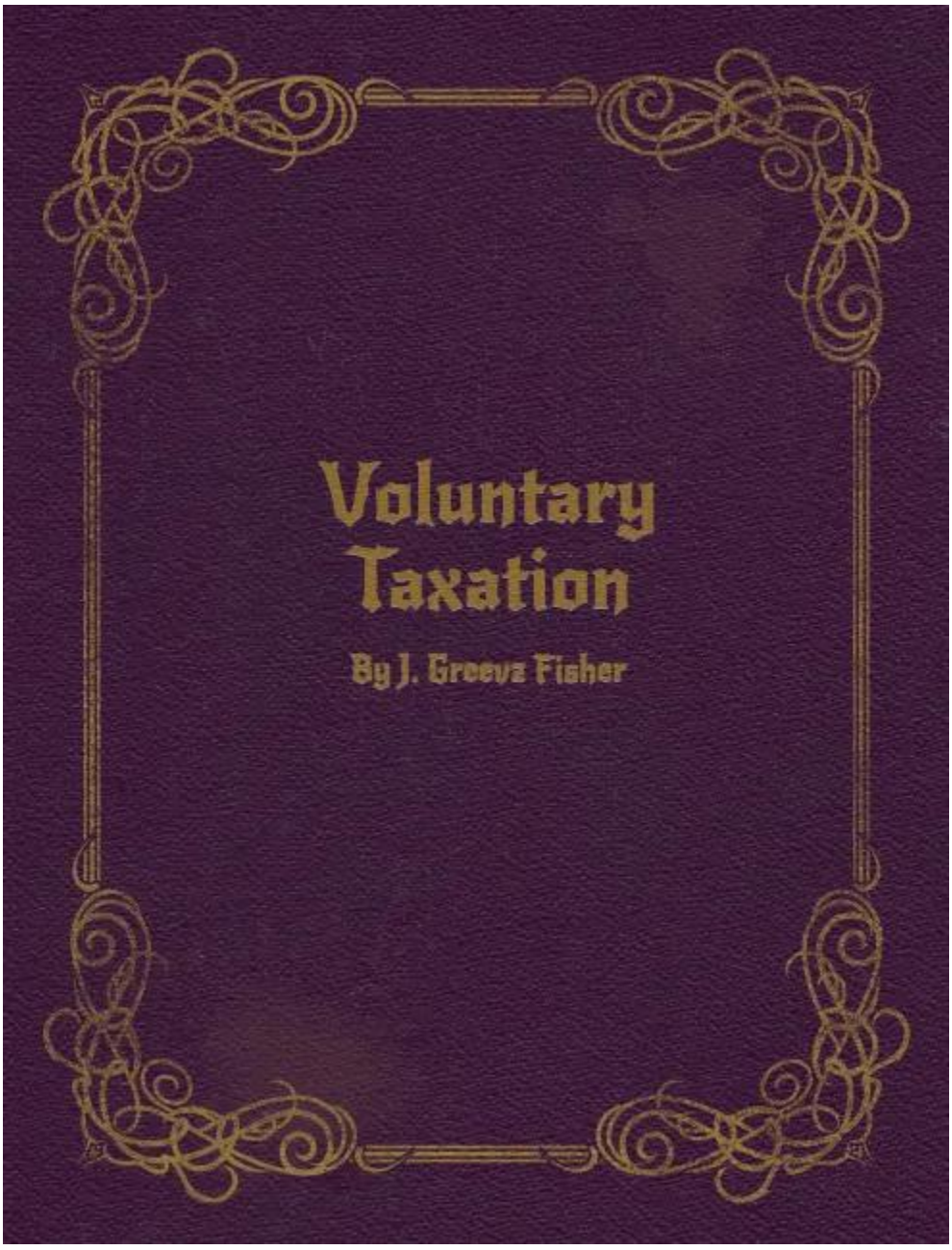
Voluntary Taxation, by J. Greevz Fisher



1. — Voluntary Taxation

To many, if not to most, readers the phrase voluntary taxation will seem an embodiment of absurdity, or an expression too Utopian for serious consideration. And yet it is no novelty. It actually exists in our State machinery, and largely

pervades our social system. Charitable institutions, dissenting religions, and political organizations are all supported by voluntary taxation. But there is a special mode of voluntary taxation which may be held most useful as a type for the voluntary subscription of State revenue. It is that department of trade known as Insurance.

It may well be doubted whether it would ever be wise or practicable to regard Government as a mendicant institution, wholly or largely dependent, like orphanages, infirmaries, or other charities, upon the energy with which the hat was circulated and the begging box shaken. These are not commercial undertakings: they are splendid monuments of the wide-spread prevalence of sympathetic feelings; and if mankind be growing in altruistic tendencies, we may hope they will be more effectively supported, although proportionately less needed, in the future than they have been in the past. But since man can always be relied upon to be selfish, though his generosity may long remain a doubtful quantity, so we may reasonably expect that establishments, based upon an exchange of services, will on the whole possess greater stability than those which are organised upon unrecompensed donations and eleemosynary subscriptions. Suppose a body of philanthropists had established a fund to reimburse those who sustain losses by fire, shipwreck, death of relatives, fraudulent clerks, etc., how would such schemes have fared? Their mere mention suffices to convey such an idea of magnitude as to involve great doubts of their feasibility upon the less certain basis of one-sided contributions. Insurance companies have little or no philanthropy in their constitution, nor are they largely endowed with a high feeling of public duty. The insurer and the insured are both animated by self-interest. One wants profits, the other wants security. They enter into a contract whereby each is benefitted. To one the safeguard is worth more than he pays for it; to the other the risk accepted is outweighed by the price obtained for undergoing it. Hence the companies flourish. But if a fire take place, and there be no policy in existence, the loser knows he need not apply to any insurance office for a remedy.

In Government, as at present supported, there is a mixture of methods. Most funds are obtained under compulsion, and in no sense imply a bargain. They more resemble black mail, an impost securing the payer from further attack. Thus the fact that a tobacco manufacturer pays large sums as custom duty gives him no special claim for Government services; any nor do payments of income or property

taxes convey any such claim. On the other hand, the Government does many things more or less gratuitously for the citizen—that is to say, the services do not in each case depend upon a particular payment. Thus the courts uphold many untaxed agreements when proved by audible evidence alone, and not upon stamped documents. Revenue is, therefore, in many cases extorted or extracted from persons when found in one set of circumstances, and applied the the benefit of persons—not always the same—in wholly different circumstances.

No doubt an insurance company gets its revenue from the whole body of its customers generally, while the actual recipients of its bounty for a small minority of its subscribers. The virtual benefit, however, is general. Each is relieved of a risk. The security is worth the payment, otherwise it would not be made. The premium is proportioned to the calculated risk at rates specially computed to yield a profitable return upon a large number of such transactions.

The same method may be said to enter already into the finances of the State. The payment of stamp duties gives a claim to lay certain classes of evidence before the legal tribunals. The varying rates or poundages may be supposed to bear some relation to the danger which a citizen would incur by neglecting the payment. Thus there are different duties upon promissory notes, mortgages, and other instruments.

It is not necessary here to seek to establish the view that every operation of Government ought to be made the subject of a bargain, contract, or policy of insurance; but it may be held that the existing system of stamp duties might advantageously be both extended and improved. This might be brought about by increasing many of the duties now charged, extending the principle of proportionate payments to receipts and other such instruments, and making stamp duties applicable to many contracts now exempt. On the other hand, stamp duty might be left quite voluntary, and only negative or optional penalties inflicted. Some of the most objectionable existing imposts, such as Income Tax, ought at once to disappear, and the aim of the public to be to go forward with this goal definitely in view.

Many very important financial, economic, and social improvements might be expected from advance in this direction. Property of various descriptions now lies idle in many instances where it might be productive of increased wealth. The owners receive much more in security from the Government than the value of their

payments to it. By offering inducements to owners to tax themselves voluntarily, and at the highest possible figure, they would have the spur of the constant expense laid upon them, urging them to employ the property productively. No law need then be proposed for the compulsory cultivation of waste lands. Other forms of property might also be stimulated into productiveness. Landed estate is perhaps that form of property which most severely tests our fidelity to the institution of private ownership. Its expediency and justice are so much less obvious to the impatient student. It is, at the same time, that in which the title is most artificial, especially when the occupancy of the land has been granted to others. It is also that whose integrity involves most outlay on the part of the Government. When land and its appurtenances have been for generations in the hands of one family of tenants, there are many considerations tending to impair the proprietory title of those who grant the tenancy. But, without being drawn aside into a discussion of the justice and expediency of this or other ownership, it seems scarcely open to dispute that those on whose behalf such costly services are rendered by the State, ought to contribute in proportion. Thus, it would be manifestly unfair to make those whose lives alone are insured by a certain office, bear the cost of insuring others against fire. Tenancies of every kind ought surely to be made to yield as much in revenue, in proportion to their value as do promises of payment of money. Landlords seeking to put into execution their powers to distrain or evict, would be required to prove to the courts that they had annually renewed a registration of the tenancy, under certain duties which would be calculated as an insurance proportionate to the chances of these proceedings becoming necessary.

The stamp duties upon receipts might also be expected to vary with the amount in evidence. Many business contracts now wholly exempt from taxation might be brought within its range. Thus, for example, every contract for the sale or purchase of goods which might become subject of litigation, ought to pay in advance for the security of the courts of law. Promises of services and employment, and multitudes of other bargains ought each to be insured by the part most interested, or by voluntary arrangement between the parties. This need not involve any unreasonable impediment to or restriction on trade. Contracts and promises merely spoken, and not reduced to writing under the hands of both the parties, might easily be made subject to the proposed legalization by stamping. This legalization would be merely an assurance that evidence could, if desired, be

laid before a court of law. Promises would be stamped by the part benefiting. Thus in, say a promise of marriage, it would be necessary for the lady, within a few days after receiving the promise, to write and vouch a history of the affair, to asses its value to herself, and to have the document stamped in proportion. Similarly with orders obtained by travellers, a one-sided statement would be stamped by the interested party.

With regard to evasions of the duties, they would, like neglect to insure against fire, etc., bring their own penalty. The existing plan of demanding the payment of a heavy fine upon an unstamped document on presentation as evidence could of course be kept up and made applicable also to unwritten contracts.

The voluntary character of this taxation would be its most valuable attribute. Those who had mutual confidence in each other, and who deliberately showed that they required no external force to uphold their bonds, would govern themselves and escape the expense of being governed.

Voluntary taxation by stamp duties would also have an important tendency to make the 'Legislature more assiduous in enacting just laws, and in securing as far as possible their just administration. One of the worst faults in our existing system of law, is that Government does not beat the expense of the mistakes of its nominees. Thus when, on appeal, the judgement of an inferior court is reverse, the enhanced costs fall, not upon the incompetent judge, nor upon those who appointed him, but upon one or more of the litigants, and sometimes upon the very party who, after much trouble and risk, has established the justice of his cause. The error costs this party a great outlay, for which he has no redress. Improvement in administration would encourage people to assure themselves a right to be heard in court. Revenue would be increased by improvement. There would thus be an inducement to make beneficial reforms.

How much more pleasant and inexpensive would be the collection of revenue if, instead of tax-gatherers pursuing us, we believed it our interest to seek them! How many anomalies and injustices might be expected to vanish as this principle extended!

It is not improbable that even the vexed question of import duties might be found to yield to the benign influence of voluntary taxation, and that we should

discover that free trade in taxation pointed the way to free trade in everything, and thus secure in a yet higher degree the wealth and comfort of the people at large. It is not necessary we should here go into the enquiry as to whether the rich would pay more and the poor less. In all probability the taxes would be found to vary with ability to pay. But they would be incomparably more equitable than those we now endure. We should advance justice and liberty simultaneously, and this ever conduces to prosperity.

2.—Voluntary Local Taxation.

If the bulk of the nation were convinced of the desirability of introducing or extending the plan of raising imperial revenue by voluntary forethought, it is evident that much could be done in this direction by means of stamp duties. These might be left wholly optional, and might be regarded by the legislature as insurance premiums, guaranteeing to the payers certain specified assistance by the various legal tribunals in case of need. It is indeed conceivable that a very considerable portion of the revenue might be raised in this way, and that this might be subject to considerable growth, side by side with an improved system of justice. Improvement in the administration of the law might be expected to progress much more rapidly if once it were realised that those who suffer by any miscarriage of justice ought to be repaid by the agency which had contract to insure the redress of grievances. Revenue by stamp duties would grow into a system necessitating sound, cheap, and just administration. *No justice, no revenue!* would be the motive power of law reform. This would be far better than the old coupling of taxation and representation.

It might well be objected that to apply this to criminal law would be difficult and dangerous, if not impossible. There is, nevertheless, a step already taken by the State in which some might detect an unsuspected movement in this direction. Government life-insurance might be held in some degree, however remote, and to some extent, however slight, to furnish an additional motive to the Government to defend the life and punish the murder of the insured. If this were supplemented by a system of insurance against false arrest and false commitment, our legal system might be much improved. In a recent case a man in poor circumstances, accused of

murder, had to be defended at private cost. Hardly anything could be a greater travesty of justice, than that the attempt to avenge a death should eventuate in the financial ruin of the person acquitted of crime.

But great as may be the difficulty of raising imperial revenue by a species of voluntary insurance effected upon civil contracts, the question of local revenue seems to involve fresh and even more serious difficulties. Space limit forbids an attempt to deal with every species of local expenditure now provided by compulsory rates, but we may glance at one or two and attempt a general solution.

The care of the poor is a local burden. Why is should be so seems difficult to determine. Some of the results are most lamentable. If it were conceded that pauperism ought to be a subject of legalised coercive support, it might yet be questioned why such inequalities and technicalities as now exist should be imported into it. The nation has taken away moral obligation from the individual, but has not itself accepted it. It has laid it upon the union. Were this a national charge it might or might not be better for the poor and for the taxpayer. It would at least be a shade less indefensible than the present system. It would very possibly simply furnish one more illustration of the incompetence of any coercive system—any compulsory cooperation, to deal with an individual and private duty. Benevolence is a virtue dependent upon the benefit which the race derives from the prevalence of fellow-feeling and unselfishness. To make it a subject of codes and statutes is to kill it. The scandal of a great increase in the number of deaths from starvation would be positively less, and would be less hurtful than the existing plan of compulsory benevolence. Not that it is at all necessary or likely that starvation would be more frequent if benevolence were left to individual sympathy and voluntary organisation. Our fish supply, our imports of food, clothing, building material, luxuries, etc., are purchased partly by the terrible deaths of many shipwrecked mariners. These are worthy men. Their salvation, so far as practicable, is undertaken by volunteer associations, and our life-boat service is a splendid monument to sympathy combined with the highest courage. What would it be if the money were raised by taxation, and if the crews were mere hirelings? Again, look at our hospitals, orphanages, infirmaries. These set, on the whole, a noble example to Government institutions, combining as they usually do, due safeguards against imposition, with most tangible help for the ailing poor. The social and economic aspects of pauperism are scarcely suitable for popular discussion. There is so much

prejudice and vapid sentiment surrounding the subject that patrial treatment is apt to cause needless misunderstanding; but it is at least permissible to observe that the creation of a legal claim to support tends to produce, and does actually produce, a race of hereditary paupers, who benefit no one, not even themselves. Taking the whole subject into consideration, may it not be held that poor rates ought to be entirely abolished, and that the taxation ought to be left wholly voluntary, ought in fact cease to be taxation? This would not free the world from misery, pain, poverty, and death. No such claim is advanced. But would it not be a slight improvement upon our present plan?

The support of semi-pauperised education out of compulsory rates is economically unsound, intellectually retrogressive, and socially dangerous. There is waste in teaching too much of some subjects and in omitting or preventing the teaching of others. There is waste in forcing book-learning upon many to whom it is useless, and in a large number of cases positively hurtful. There is enormous waste of fund arising from transferring the control of the expenditure into the hands of local politicians, who towards every £100 they spend only contribute perhaps one penny from their own pockets, and who obtain a very full return for this penny in gratified self-esteem, in the admiration of their special coteries, and possibly in nepotism, jobbery, etc.; and there is waste of substance in forcible withholding the pupils from productive labor. There is obstruction to general mental progress in subjecting education and research to codes and formulas, which, though they imply infallibility, are yet always undergoing modification; obstruction in the setting up a dogmatism, partly in religion, but especially in science, history, art, spelling, etc. And there is social danger in undermining parental liberty, responsibility, and authority; in crushing out voluntary schooling; in setting up as a standard of value the views of the Department instead of the test of the market. Education is not a fit subject for taxed support. Voluntary and commercial effort did marvels in furthering education, and had they been let alone our progress would have been sounder, if less showy.

Even in the formation and maintenance of roads, streets, and footpaths, there is much that could be done upon a voluntary basis. The substitution of compulsory general taxation for tolls, or direct payments for use, cannot be looked upon as unmixed blessing. Had turnpikes still been in general use, no doubt they would ere now have adopted improved methods. Few, if any of those who advocate State

purchase of railways would abolish the ticket system, or throw the lines open to every owner of rolling stock. If those who use public railways have to book by the journey, or by the season tickets, why should not the same plan apply to roads? There may be inconvenience in having to go through the formalities of booking, ticket showing, etc., but they have their conveniences also. Turnstiles and gates upon roads would, of course, lend themselves to the system of season tickets, or other contrivances to reduce the labor of toll-takers and habitual users. If roads were private property in the hands of individuals or companies, and were managed upon competitive principles, there would be many gains to set off against the anticipated inconveniences. There are at least a few students of the subject who are bold enough to hold that even here the system of free contract would give the best results.

Gas, water, and drainage would not present more serious difficulties, than those with which we have dealt above. Voluntary organisations might be expected to own the streets of towns, and carry out improvements conducive to their sanitary, aesthetic, and commercial welfare. This may appear incredibly over-sanguine to many readers; but surely the munificence which has provided Birmingham, Bradford, Keighley, and other large towns with parks, which has given Kirkstall Abbey to Leeds, and which has provided innumerable monuments, fountains, band-stans, clocks, etc., to say nothing of ecclesiastical buildings, stained windows, etc. might, in the absence of compulsion, be relied upon to organise itself and concentrate itself with even greater success upon the more substantial and more needful objects.

It must always be borne in mind that compulsion discourages voluntary action and thought. We can never fully realise how much people can do until we really put them to it. Hence we may draw the conclusion that if there were a general desire to abstain from banding ourselves together to coerce and compel money from others, and if we were to unite unconstrainedly for our common good with those who agreed in desiring the advancement of various useful public objects, our success in these matters would be as great as now, and with it we should have the more splendid success of justice and liberty. From these spring all true greatness, and from them also spring commercial prosperity, general wealth, and the greatest attainable happiness. Surely it is worth an effort!

3.—Principles of Taxation.

In arranging for the collection of the State revenue nearly every principle but th right one has from time to time been adopted. The demands of the Treasury have extended and ramified into every department of life, and have been harnessed to every hobby that has ever been ridden. Revenue has been made a means of combatting, as it was believed, every evil, real or fancied. To it reformers, ancient and recent, have looked to protect and purify trade, to keep down luxury, and to eliminate crime and vice.

In all this we have lost sight of the one guiding principle, that taxation ought to be simply a payment for services rendered. Were this principle prevalent in finance we should we should have no evasions, no smuggling, and no frauds upon revenue, except such as might arise out of the imperfection of the mechanical means adopted to acknowledge the payments. These, like all other documentary instruments, would be open to forgery, and since they would be regarded as valuable promises of service to be rendered in case of need, they would present ordinary temptations. Frauds of this kind are now possible. They would not be novel. They might easily be made more difficult than now.

Of all the imposts which disgrace public finance there are perhaps none less defensible than Customs and Excise. These levies are, and, unfortunately, are frequently intended to be, not merely revenue producers, but trade barriers. Some wiseacre thinks that cheap wheat injures the country by bringing other lands into competition with our own, so an import duty is placed upon corn. Sweep this away. Enjoy the benefits of the repeal. See trade expand and wealth abound, and yet we are troubled with endlessly reiterated demands for protection, reciprocal tariff, and what not. How senseless! Suppose a town had two bakers and only one chimney sweep. The last-named purchases his bread exclusively from one baker. The other refuses to employ him, and incurs five shillings' worth of dirt and trouble in sweeping his chimney himself to avoid paying say a shilling. This is reciprocity. Because France won't freely admit our textile products we ought to refuse to buy her wines which we cannot ourselves produce. Octori and Custom boundaries are stupid impediments to the free interchange of commodities.

Only two valid arguments for their continuance can be adduced. (1)—that necessary revenue could not be raised without them, and (2)—that the economic loss they involve is a defensive tax on the nature of that raised in times of peace to maintain our fighting forces. Both of these depend ultimately upon the artificial subdivision of mankind into nations, with forcibly maintained boundaries. They originate in the fear of war and violence. There is no more benefit in taxing imports to Leeds France than in taxing imports from Lancashire, Bradford, or Hunslet. But we do not consider it necessary to isolate Leeds into an independent State, with a force-made frontier. If we feared that the neighbouring towns or counties might war against Leeds, we might have to submit to the impoverishment attendant upon protective duties undertaken with a view of fostering within the municipal boundary every productive trade, including, of course, corn growing, gunpower, manufacture, etc. But this would be very disadvantageous if regarded from an economical point of view. Now, under the conditions of modern life, State boundaries must to a great extent be regarded as imaginary, unreal, and conventional. Commerce and migrations cause people so to mix under various Governments, that State interests are now in many cases not race or tribal interests. Competition just as present is not often between nation and nation for existence, but between the individuals within a nation and between them and certain individuals in other nations. The Germans do not exterminate the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine and replace them by pure German stock. We suffer a constant invasion of foreigners, and we peacefully invade all countries. American States bind under a common Government Europeans, Africans, Asiatics, and Aboriginal Americans. Modern warfare is often a complete mistake. The real battle of races is almost wholly commercial. The maintenance of national integrity is a mere fetish. What ordinary Englishman can tell what he individually would lose by this country being completely conquered by, say the German Empire, or by the French Republic, or what difference it would make to him if our kingdom conquered on or both of the above Governments? Did the Southern States of the American Union lose by being conquered by the North? Do the Jews lose through not being a nation? Would they gain aught if there were now a king of the Jews?

If it could be shown that Government performs some special duties at the boundaries of the empire in connection with goods entering or leaving the country, then a uniform toll might be exacted for the privilege of crossing the frontier. So

long, however, as the revenue continues to be raised in terms of gold, which seems indispensable, then the frontier tax should take the form of a proportionate gold charge upon the gold value of the commodities as assessed by the owners. A differential tariff is unnecessary, unjust, and nonsensical. All commodities should be taxed in terms of their gold value alone, or else taxed in kind. The tax should be levied without the slightest reference to what is called the protection of native industries, and solely in consideration of services rendered by the Governments to the owners of the commodities. This would, of course, be proportionate to their value.

National revenue, as a whole, may be regarded as a gigantic blunder, and as an apt illustration of the extreme slowness with which the human mind progresses in true perception of the essential facts of our existence. Power to oppress and coerce, not liberty to compete on equal terms, is what we all too much seek. This leads us into every sort of vileness. Above all, it lands us in that form of robbery known as taxation. Coercion needs a large revenue. This it obtains by fresh coercion. There is, no doubt, a small movement perceptible in the direction of optional duties. The degree of noxiousness of any impost decreases as its voluntary element increases. Thus receipt stamp duty is almost ideally perfect. If I pay to a friend a sum of money, and take no documentary acknowledgement, I escape the tax. This impost lacks perfection in two ways. (1)—it extends Government protection to operations where Government has not been paid in due time, and (2)—it regards the signing of an unstamped receipt as fraud, instead of simply leaving the parties to be a law to themselves. In such cases they only omit as before duly to ensure Government protection.

Succession duties again want little to make them perfection. There is no occasion for Government to demand its blackmail from those who receive gifts from a dying man. It ought merely to specify that such gifts, if they be at any time made subject of an action at law, or of any form of registration under Government, should require to be proved upon documents which had been duly and timely stamped. A wealthy person who writes a paper setting forth wishes which he desires to be effectual after his death, assumes that Government will be his faithful friend in enforcing his will and passing his title to those survivors whom he desires to enrich. For this he ought to pay handsomely, or, to put it more logically and more practically, he ought to pay handsomely year by year for the immeasurable

help Government gives him in maintaining his title, and his successors ought to become instantly liable for similar payments if they desire to continue the assurance of legal protection.

Patent and registration stamps are open to little or no objection. Licences, on the other hand, yield a very obnoxious revenue. Most of them constitute an immoral compact to maintain an iniquitous monopoly. Doctors, bankers, publicans, hawkers, auctioneers, lawyers, engine drivers, cabmen, are holders of unjust privileges which ought to be open to all men. If I choose to employ a fool to plead my case in court I must bear the loss. If I will purchase and consume alcohol in excess, let me take the consequences. But, on the other hand, if I demand a proof that a physician has graduated at a certain college, and it I duly and timely register the document, then Government ought to be prepared to enforce my claim for damages against any quack who wrongly pretends to a qualification he never actually obtained. Hereditary honours and patents of nobility are unjust monopolies.

The revenue raised by obnoxious imposts is often lavished upon those who have no real claim upon the State for the large expenditure it undertakes in their behalf. Have Irish (or English) landlords duly and timely taxed themselves sufficiently to entitle them to the assistance of large bodies of police and military at evictions? What have the former done to deserve that the police should besiege and endeavour to starve out tenants who re-enter their dismantled hovels? They ought to blush for their meanness in allowing money raised out of income-tax from poor tradesmen, duties upon the artizans' tea, beer, or tobacco, and upon licences for match hawkers, to be poured out like water in upholding their bargains. The fools, as many of these landlords are, have by their grasping, over-reached themselves, discouraged or ruined the tenants whom they ought to have nourshed and helped; they have endangered national unity and peace, and they have brought discredit upon the system of land owning, which it is most desirable should be rationally upheld. All this they have done at the expense, in great measure, of others. But this is human. human also it is to work for a better arrangement. Equity demands that obnoxious coercive imposts should be relinquished, and equity is every justified by results. The principles which would lead to voluntary taxation would also relinquish many costly but wholly needless Government departments. Revenue is now uselessly wrung from poor people, who are little benefited in return. It may be

foolish to dream of a millenium where poverty and misery are unknown, but surely we can agree that the spread of principles such as we have been contemplating would imply, if they did not cause, a nobler humanity than we have yet seen.

4.—Defensive Taxation

The most important and most deadly warfare to be observed throughout animated existence is not that in which one organism directly attacks another, but the indirect struggle by which one simply surpasses another in effectiveness. The strife of human animals illustrates this universal rule. Industrial warfare is far more potent in determining the destiny of races than is the carnage of the battlefield. Many a victorious warrior loses all his substance and fails to establish a family, because of his inaptitude for the arts of commerce. Many a nation which has conquered in stubborn and sanguinary conflicts sustains invasion, loss of territory, or even practical extension from mere inability to hold its own in that industrial struggle which survives the roar of cannon and the clash of arms. War seldom exterminates; industrial competition often does. Resort to arms generally concerns matters which are really of very trivial importance either to the human race as a whole, or to any particular variety of humanity. At the present day the inhabitants of politically distinct areas tend so to intermingle that the military forces of a particular Government may be offensively or defensively engaged on behalf of a motley crew gathered from the four winds of heaven, and representing a fortuitous aggregation of diverse kids of men, whose competition continues alike during peace and war.

This applies not only to civilised States when matched one against the other, but also to the strife of the civilised with savage races. Extermination is effected by industrial competition rather than by actual bloodshed.

The strife of industry, however, is not wholly exempt from forcible methods. The whole process is not confined to a steeplechase in which the winners out-distance the losers, leave them behind, and neglect their efforts and their fate. The penal laws go so far as to infringe the liberty and assault the person of him ‘what prigs what isn’t his’n.’ But this is not the only mode of forcibly supplementing the

contest of mere nimbleness. Commodities are owned. Ownership requires enclosure. Barriers and coverings must be provided to exclude destroying or deteriorating influences. These often adapt themselves to the double function of guarding against both decay and theft. Thus we forcibly exclude the thief without assault or violence. He becomes perhaps an outside prisoner, like the drunken man who goes round and round a railed-in monument, complaining he cannot find the way out. The man who is forcibly *kept out* of a large share of the area of England is thereby *confined* to a small area.

The instinct or faculty upon which the owning, hoarding, and preserving of property depend is a most important one. It is a of great value in furthering the progress of the race. It implies forethought, continuous effort, self-control, and other valuable qualities. It usually demands studious recognition of the proprietory rights of others. A miser, though he may exhibit this faculty in a morbid form, and though he may strain the usages of society to add to his own store, would surely be the last in the world to foment a violent and public attack upon the property of others; because by so doing he would endanger his own.

Private property has likewise great economic advantages not otherwise obtainable, at least in the present state of human nature. It utilises selfishness, and causes it to contribute to the general good. It has undoubted and exceedingly grave drawbacks. The vast accumulations of wealth in the hands of certain individuals, and the maintenance of many idle rich persons, may be admitted to be serious evils. But disorganization of industry, discouragement of thrift, and many other evils of even greater magnitude would follow from any considerable invasion of the principle of private property. Many writers, dwelling upon the incidental evils of private property, have upheld the view that it has no foundation in abstract justice, and have endeavoured to elaborate a social scheme in which private property shall be absent, and in which incentives to industry shal arise from absolutely equitable fundamentals. Every such scheme and every such philosophy is vitiated by the assumption of the very principle which it undertakes to overthrow. Life is impossible without monopoly, aggression, robbery. The earth is so small, and life so fertile, that encroachment and pillage is universal. The lion robs the antelope, and the antelope robs the plant of its tissues. Man is the greatest and most effectual of all robbers. He has exterminated great numbers of the larger animals and many plants Civilised man exterminates and supplants barbarous and

savage man, and both press hardly upon the apes and all other large animals, saving only the domesticated races, which are, however, completely at man's mercy.

But while civilised man is and must remain an utterly implacable tyrant, there seems to be a growth within him of suavity and courtesy—a development of compassionateness and sympathy which masks and disguises the process of his despotism. There seem to be some indications of the growth of a feeling that we ought under all circumstances absolutely and totally to abstain from bloodshed, wounding, torturing, assaulting, flogging, or life-taking. We need not expect that sanguinary war will wholly cease tomorrow or next day, but we may easily recognise in the habitual tone of society around us, in the headings of newspaper paragraphs, and in many other ways, a tendency to regard bloodshed and violence as shocking, disgraceful, and abhorrent. Now it can scarcely be doubted that under the surface of this growing delicacy of feeling there is actually in full work a ceaseless strife more deadly than that observed even in a great European war.

And yet there is at this moment actually a sort of truce in this bloodless warfare. The enormous development of trade, the rapid progress of mechanical invention, the extension of railways in America and India, the opening of the Suez Canal, and many other causes, have during recent modern times so mitigated the pressure of population on the means of subsistence, that an enormous increase has for a long time taken place in the numbers of civilized man. Similar causes can hardly be expected perpetually to increase our power of producing those commodities which give life and wealth. Wealth has recently not only increased steadily, but the very rate of increase itself has been constantly increasing. Even in what we have regarded as times of depression we have been progressing at a pace only slightly slackened. In the near future it is only reasonable to anticipate a state of things where the struggle will actually be much more severe. The mind is unable to analyse the problem which will then present itself. If mankind has had sufficient training and growth in wisdom and prudence, we may hope that the critical period, when emigration is hardly possible, when coal and wheat are much less plentiful, and when mechanics have few fresh vitally important gifts to bestow, may be passed in safety and in bloodless war. Should, however, the masses overturn the fabric of society, or even undermine the industrial arrangement involved in private

ownership, we need scarcely doubt that they will themselves be seriously injured, and the crisis actually aggravated.

Private property must, however, be expected to bear the cost of its own maintenance. It is hardly fair to tax burglars, to provide safes or strongrooms to guard property from their attacks. The poor pay far too large a share of State revenue. Their very poverty is further impoverished by our fiscal systems. Much remains to be accomplished by a rational system of revenue in mitigation the abnormalities of vast accumulations. Many of these are far in excess of what is necessary to constitute a reasonable incentive for the highest activity of the most highly endowed commercial organizers.

But there is little danger that any improved system of taxation would seriously impoverish the rich, or seriously discourage the great directors of commerce. It might do much to help the weak without enfeebling the strong. The up-hill path from the rank and file to the council of war is rendered needlessly arduous by systems of taxation whose grinding almost ceases to be felt just at the point when it could be most easily borne. Voluntary taxation as a form of insurance, may be expected to do much to ameliorate the early struggles of those whose ultimate success is so important to their kind.